Anatomy of a controversy: nuclear power in Portugal

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The research project

- **Nuclear Portugal: Physics, Technology, Medicine and Environment (1910-2010)**

- **Aims:** exploring the manifold dimensions and ramifications of the history of nuclear research and science in Portugal, from 1910 to the present.

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This presentation

- Study of Anti-Nuclear Movements in Europe has mostly left out the Portuguese case
- Proposed construction of a nuclear power plant in Ferrel (a fishing village north of Lisbon) in the 1970s led to a public debate
- Nuclear debate in Portugal of particular relevance following the onset of the democratic regime
- Analysis of the positions of the social actors involved: document and media analysis and interviews with local leaders, environmentalists and scientists
Anti-Nuclear Movements in Europe

- Study of ANM in Europe mostly based on social movements theory
- Focus mostly on success and failure and corresponding strategies of these movements, often through formal approaches
- Focus on central Europe: Portugal and Spain largely left out
  - Absence of ANM in these countries?
  - Lack of research?
  - Political regimes - dictatorship regimes?
This approach as a contribution to further research on anti-nuclearism in Europe

- Towards:
  - trans-disciplinary approaches, across:
    - political science
    - social studies of technology
    - environmental history
    - political ecology
  - expanding transnational / comparative research across western and eastern Europe
  - expanding transnational / comparative research across democratic and dictatorial regimes
Anti-nuclear protest in western Europe (1970s)

- France
  - 1971: demonstrations against powerplant in Bugey. Sit-in, anti-nuclear camp and march to Lyon.
  - 1975: anti-nuclear manifesto signed by 400 scientists
  - 1976: massive demonstration at Creys-Malville. Occupations and road blockage at Plogoff; strike at the La Hague reprocessing plant
  - 1977: demonstrations at Malville

- Germany
  - 1972: demonstrations against new nuclear plants on the French/German banks of the Rhine
  - 1975: occupations at Whyl
  - 1976: direct actions in Brokdorf, Grohnde and Kalka
Anti-nuclear protest in western Europe (1970s)

- Austria
  - 1971: Construction work begins on Austria’s first nuclear power plant in Zwentendorf;
  - 1974: massive local protests against the construction of a second central
  - 1976: information campaign launched by the government has the opposite effect (increase in opposition to nuclear)
  - 1977: large demonstrations in Zwentendorf and other Austrian cities
  - 1978: As a result of the referendum regarding the activation of the nuclear power station in Zwentendorf, the Law Banning the Use of Atomic Power is enacted.

- Denmark/Sweden
  - 1976-77 demonstrations at Barseback

- UK
  - 1978-79: Demonstrations and occupations at Torness

- Spain
  - 1974-74 demonstrations against construction of power plant in Deba and Lemoniz (Basque Country)
  - 1976-77 demonstrations against construction of power plant in Xove (Galicia)
Portugal: the background

- Portugal had important uranium reserves (in the mainland and colonies in Africa)
- Creation of the Nuclear Energy Board – JEN (1954)
- Founding member of NATO and IAEA
- Decision to build a Nuclear Research Reactor, under the Atoms for Peace Program (1961)
Portugal: the background

- JEN as an elite within the technocracy of the regime
- Nuclear ambitions were shared within the technoscientific elite (despite undeclared political opposition)
- Industrialists and bankers, strongly linked to the regime, moved to promote the Portuguese Company of Nuclear Industries (CPIN)
- Central interest of the state electricity utility (CPE)
- First studies identify Ferrel as the preferred site for a nuclear power plant
Local protest

- Revolution in 1974 puts on hold nuclear plans
- On January 1976, government announces the advancement of studies at the chosen site for the future power plant: the small village of Ferrel, about 100km from Lisbon
- On March 1976, local population marches to the power plant location, demanding immediate abandonment of the ongoing construction works
Local protest

- in response to the relentless chime of the church bells, the inhabitants of Ferrel went out into the street, stopped all the works, closed the ditches that had been opened and warned that if the works restarted they would come back to destroy whatever had been done (APEAT 1981)

- CALCAN Support Commission for the Struggle Against the Nuclear Threat sends a protest telegram to the Prime-Minister, signed by local associations, local newspapers, residents’ committees, local business, trade unions and schools
Environmentalists

- February 1977: the environmental group “Living is Needed” launched a national appeal under the heading “We are all inhabitants of Ferrel”, against the pro-nuclear policy of the government.

- June 1977: forum at a nearby city, Caldas da Rainha, that issues the statements “Portuguese Nuclear Programme Moratorium” and “People’s Creative Intervention in Defence of a Non Depleted Environment”
Environmentalists

- January 1978: Festival “For Life and Against Nuclear” at Caldas da Rainha (debates, workshops, concerts, exhibitions), reenactment of the demonstration at the location at the power plant, led by environmentalists (symbolic plantation of potatoes)
Scientific controversy: debates

- 1975: First Meeting on Energy Policy, promoted by the Electricity Company, Delgado Domingos expresses opposition towards nuclear energy in Portugal
- 1976: Second Meeting on Energy Policy (March), debate promoted by the Organising Committee of the Energy Meetings (May)
Scientific controversy: publications

- 1976: government commissions a White Book on the Nuclear Programme
- 1977: *Raiz e Utopia* publishes a round-table with pro and against nuclear scientists and the *Manifesto on Energy Policy – For a National Debate on Nuclear Energy* signed by over 100 scientists and engineers
- Articles and opinion columns in several newspapers
Scientific controversy: publications

[the book] stems from the conscience that technicians and scientists have a civic mission of public enlightenment that must be fulfilled within their areas of expertise and to the best of their abilities (…). The authors aim to enlighten the reader about the problems of real importance that the use of nuclear energy raises in our country, in order for him to distinguish what is crucial from what is not and take a substantiated position (…). The debate about the nuclear power plant is an exemplary case of the participation that citizens could and should have in the discussion of undertakings and economic and social policy options that are determinant for the future of a region or country. The authors hope that this book contributes to helping the debate become more useful and fruitful (Moura et al. 1978, 16).
Scientists and local movement

It was in a theatre, there were a lot of people there, I was very anguished, but I explained them some fundamental data, the issue of the currents. (…). They were fishermen, so I remembered the example of an accident in which they drowned, so I said “you don’t need experts, you know the currents, you know if someone drowns here where you can pick him up”. It was immediate harmony, they raised me on their shoulders, I was very embarrassed. (Interview with Delgado Domingos, 2004)
Scientists and local movement

It seemed that my voice, as a scientist (I had already a PhD), as a physicist, I had something to say. My involvement in political life was to contribute to raise awareness in the population about what nuclear was and what was at stake, the risks. (Interview with Carlos Matos Ferreira, 2013)
Nuclear developer and local movement

- The electrical company held several public meetings at Ferrel, with their own experts and published a leaflet
Closure

- Lack of funds for building the nuclear power plant
- Influent government ministers against nuclear energy
- Seismic risk at Ferrel
Reemergence of the nuclear option?